

AMURCON 2020
International Scientific Conference**OPPOSITION “LIGHT–DARKNESS” IN *POEMS ABOUT A
BEAUTIFUL LADY* BY A. BLOK**

Elena Spivakova (a)*

*Corresponding author



(a) Sholom-Aleichem Priamursky State University, 70a Shirokaya St., Birobidzhan, Russia, alena.spivakova@mail.ru

Abstract

The article researches linguistic poetics. It reflects the next stage of work on the creation of the author's dictionary describing the word usage of A. Blok in the collection *Poems about a Beautiful Lady*. The reader is offered a detailed description of the semantics of lexemes that make up the opposition “LIGHT-DARKNESS” in this collection. When interpreting, the author uses the method of gradual expansion of the context from the level of collocations to the level of a complete work, which allows us to determine the set of semantemes used by A. Blok for each lexeme under study, to characterize combinatorial increments of meaning, to identify cases of words used in the author's meaning. Methods of immanent analysis of poetic speech are used. The description of the semantics of words included in the lexical-semantic group “DARKNESS” is carried out for the first time. The author concludes that the symbolism of light and darkness in the collection, although based on tradition, is still idiosyncratic. Light is an attribute of a Beautiful Lady. It symbolizes the meeting with the beloved, sacred knowledge, revelation. Darkness is associated with loneliness, end of passion, death, madness. But light and darkness can be both opposed and connected to each other through the image of the mystical beloved of the lyrical hero. The attribute of a Beautiful Lady is not only light, but also twilight. But if the light marks the appearance of Eternal Femininity in the world in full force, then the twilight precedes this phenomenon.

2357-1330 © 2021 Published by European Publisher.

Keywords: A. Blok, linguistic poetics, author's lexicography, idiosyncratic, aesthetic meaning, combinatorial increments of meaning



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

1. Introduction

Linguistic poetics is an integrative discipline based on the achievements of linguistics, literary studies, rhetoric, and aesthetics. The subject of its research is “*artistic functions of text signs and mechanisms of their creation and perception*” (Krasnova, 2019, p. 71).

One of the areas of linguopoetic research is the creation of writers’ dictionaries. Our article reflects the next stage in the development of a monographic explanatory writer’s dictionary: the dictionary of “Poems about the Beautiful Lady by A. Blok.” The relevance of this work results from a number of reasons. 1. The formation of the anthropocentric paradigm in linguistics involves the study of the idiolect of the linguistic personality. 2. The study of the language of poetry allows us to fully reveal the potential of language units, which is not always realized in other types of discourse. 3. A. Blok is a poet with a developed linguistic reflection, each word in his idiosyncratic style is included in the associative network, due to which the meaning becomes more complex and deeper.

2. Problem Statement

The opposition of light and darkness is a cultural universal. The metaphorical concept formed by this opposition has its foundations in human physiology and everyday life. A person is active during the day, when it is daylight and you can distinguish objects. Night is a time of sleep when a person is passive and defenseless. Therefore, light is activity, life, clarity, understanding and cognition, fortune, good. Light is connected with heights, the sky, spirituality. Darkness in most cultures, on the contrary, is passivity, sleep and death, uncertainty, ignorance, evil. Darkness is associated with the underworld, the unconscious, and demonic forces.

In the works of A. Blok, the “LIGHT—DARK” opposition occupies a significant place. But the idiosyncrasy and complexity of the poet's style suggest that his interpretation of the universal concept must have individual characteristics. This idea is also suggested by the high significance and semantic capacity of such integrators as “dream” and “mystery”, which are indirectly related to the second member of the opposition under consideration. Thus, “in the poetic world of A. Blok, *sleep* is not so much a state of rest in the oblivion of feelings, as a very clear and intense experience of the highest reality” (Spivakova, 2019). *Mystery*, according to our observations, is associated with such meanings as “revelation”, “sacred knowledge”, “a mystical rite that communicates special grace to the believer”. That is, the units included in the nominative field of the concept of “DARKNESS” reveal semantic features that belong rather to the concept of “LIGHT”.

The study of other linguistic units that form the idiosyncratic style of A. Blok in general and the style of the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” in particular showed that most of them are characterized by a duality of symbolic meanings.

Thus, it is necessary to study in detail the lexemes representing the opposition “LIGHT-DARKNESS” in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” by A. Blok.

3. Research Questions

The object of research in our article was the opposition “LIGHT—DARKNESS” in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady”. The subject of the study is the aesthetic meaning of the words that represent this opposition in the collection.

In this work, for the first time, we will give a complete interpretation of the lexemes included in the thematic group “DARKNESS”, describing the contextual increments of meaning that arise in poetic texts. This is the scientific novelty of the study.

The theoretical significance of the study consists in the development of the method of interpretation of the poetic word.

The results of our research work can be used to compile a dictionary of “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” by A. Blok.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is a detailed description of the semantics of lexemes that represent the opposition “LIGHT – DARKNESS” in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady”.

Objectives of the research work: 1) based on the data of explanatory dictionaries, construct models of common language meanings of lexemes of interest to us; 2) analyze the closest compatibility of lexemes to identify the sememes used by the author and highlight the most common connotations; 3) complete the identification of combinatorial increments of meaning based on contextual analysis.

5. Research Methods

The paper uses methods of immanent analysis of artistic speech: contextual analysis, component analysis of lexical meaning. Elements of combinatorial-semantic analysis of collocations in M. V. Vlavatsky's interpretation were also used (Vlavatskaya, 2020). The preference for the term “combinatorics” rather than for the more familiar term “syntagmatic” here results from the fact that “combinatorics of linguistic units depend on the extralinguistic situation and the communicative task” (Vlavatskaya, 2017, p. 42), while syntagmatic refers to a dimensional concept that reflects the associative possibilities of the lexeme, due to both language and speech.

6. Findings

A detailed description of the semantics of the lexeme *light* was made by us in an earlier work. We came to the following conclusions.

Of the 12 sememes included in the content plan of the lexeme *light* in modern Russian, the poet uses seven, in a number of contexts the word *light* is used in the author's own meaning. The following sememes are most common: 1) radiant energy perceived by the eye and making the surrounding world visible; 2) lighting coming from a certain source or characteristic of a certain part of the day; 3) dawn; 4) a light source.

Contextual analysis allowed us to identify combinatorial increments of meaning. Light is often a sign that promises a meeting, but it is an incorrect, deceptive sign. Light is also an attribute of a Beautiful

Lady in her divine incarnation. When the lexeme *light* is used in the author's own meaning, the semes “revelation”, “sacred truth”, “that which brings grace and happiness” are brought into relief (Spivakova, 2020).

The word *тьма* (*darkness*) should be considered an antonym of the word *свет* (*light*) in modern Russian. But in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” this lexeme is not widely used. In antonymic relations with the word *light* enter lexemes that form a synonym series: *сумрак*, *сумерки*, *тьма*, *мрак*, *мгла*, *темнота*, *полумрак*, *полусумрак*, *полутьма* (*twilight*, *twilight*, *darkness*, *gloom*, *haze*, *murk*, *dusk*, *dimness*, *crepuscle*).

To create models of the usual meanings of the lexemes, we are interested in, we used explanatory dictionaries: “Dictionary of the living Great Russian Language” by Dahl (1882), explanatory dictionary by Ushakov (2008) and dictionary by Ozhegov (2004).

The meaning of the *тьма* [*darkness*] lexeme includes three sememes: 1) lack of light, illumination, darkness, dimness; 2) ignorance, slow-wittedness, lack of education, cultural backwardness; 3) the unknown.

According to the dictionaries of Ushakov (2008) and Ozhegov (2004), the lexemes *тьма* (*darkness*) and *темнота* (*murk*) are absolute synonyms. But in the dictionaries of Dahl (1882) and Evgenieva (1988), the lexeme *темнота* (*murk*) has two sememes that are not present in the meaning of the word *тьма* (*darkness*): 4) obscurity, incomprehensibility; 5) the property of dark as a quality.

In the meaning of the lexeme *мрак* (*gloom*), four sememes can be distinguished: 1) complete absence of light, illumination, darkness; 2) joylessness, hopelessness, melancholy; 3) lack of culture, ignorance; 4) about something unclear.

The *сумерки* (*twilight*) lexeme is an incomplete synonym for the word *тьма* (*darkness*). The model of its lexical meaning looks like this: 1) twilight before sunrise, and also between sunset and nightfall; 2) twilight, neither light nor darkness; 3) weak light before sunrise in the east or in the west after sunset; 4) the time between the appearance of the first light and sunrise, also between sunset and nightfall; 5) decline.

The word *сумрак* (*dusk*) is unambiguous and coincides in meaning with the second lexical-semantic variant (LSV) of the lexeme *сумерки* (*twilight*).

The lexeme *мгла* (*haze*) is ambiguous, but it is included in the synonymous series of interest to us by the second LSV: 2) twilight, darkness.

As we said above, the antonym of the word *свет* (*light*) in Russian is the word *тьма* (*darkness*). But in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” the most commonly used other members of the synonymous series are *сумерки* (*twilight*) и *сумрак* (*dusk*), which contain not only the semes “мрак” (*gloom*) and “тьма” (*darkness*), but also the semes “weak light”, “the ability to distinguish objects”, “sunrise”, “sunset”. Also, pay attention to the use of the semi-prefix (полутьма, полумрак, полусумрак (semi-darkness, semi-obscure, semi-dusk). These features of word usage suggest that the symbolism of light and darkness in the collection is not unambiguous, and these concepts, usually opposed to each other, can be paradoxically connected in the world of “Poems about a Beautiful Lady”.

Combinatorial analysis of collocations involving the word *тьма* (*darkness*), showed that A. Blok uses only the first sememe in the collection “Poems about a Beautiful Lady”, namely “absence of light, illumination, darkness, darkness”. This is a direct nominative value. LSV 3 “Unknown” is not used

independently, but this sema can manifest itself as a combinatorial increment of meaning when the word *тьма* (*darkness*) is used in the first meaning. As part of the predicative unit, *тьма бродила* (*darkness wandered*), darkness is personified.

The lexeme *темнота* (*murk*) is also used only in one LSV “lack of light, illumination, darkness”. In the phrases *шептать с темнотой* (*whisper to the murk*), *хохотать с темнотой* (*laugh with the murk*) darkness is personified. It can be assumed that *тьма* (*darkness*) и *темнота* (*murk*) in the collection are absolute synonyms.

The *сумерки* (*twilight*) lexeme is used primarily in the second LSV “twilight, neither light nor darkness”. In several combinations, the sema “half-light” is brought into relief. The following attributes of twilight are distinguished: *сумерки весние* (*весны*) (*spring twilight*), *зимы* (*зимнего дня*) (*winter (winter day) twilight*), *серые, молодые, твои* (*grey, young and yours*). The collocations *сумерки твои* (*your twilight*) and *молодые сумерки* (*young twilight*) should be considered occasional. Occasional collocations as “unique, unusual combinations of words belonging to the style of a particular author with a view to produce an expressive and aesthetic effect in a work or text” (Vlavatskaya, 2018, p. 32).

The lexeme *сумрак* (*dusk*), according to dictionaries, is unambiguous. The analysis of phrases allows you to identify attributive signs of twilight: *сумрак алый* (*crimson dusk*), *зари* (*dawn dusk*), *мутно-голубой* (*obscure blue dusk*), *вечереющий* (*evening dusk*), *неизвестный* (*unknown dusk*), *гробовой* (*grave dusk*). Sentence analysis reveals an unusual predicative sign of twilight: *сумрак вспыхнет* (*flashing twilight/dusk*). The fact that the darkness breaks out like a light, something he attributed to the red color, the possibility of combining *сумрак зари* (*the dusk of dawn*) shows that, in addition to sememe “incomplete darkness, in which you can still distinguish objects, twilight”, in the book “Poems about the Beautiful Lady” this lexeme also has the author's idiosyncratic meaning of “dawn”. The collocation *сумрак гробовой* (*twilight of the grave*) performs an expressive-synonymous function (metaphorical) and has the meaning of “death”. In the combination of *сумрак неизвестный* (*unknown twilight*), along with the meaning of “twilight”, the seme “unknown”, characteristic of the word *тьма* (*dark*), is realized.

The lexeme *мрак* is usually used in the direct, nominative meaning “complete absence of light, illumination, darkness”. In one context, there is a figurative meaning of “joylessness, hopelessness, melancholy”. The lexeme *мгла* (*haze*) is used in the second LSV “twilight, darkness”.

Contextual analysis allowed us to identify the following individual author's connotations of the words *тьма* and *темнота*. (*darkness, dark*).

In a number of poems, *тьма* and *темнота* (*darkness and murk*) are opposed to *свет* (*light*), for example, in the poem “Высоко с темнотой сливается стена...” [“High with darkness merges the wall...”] *Свет* (*light*) here is associated with the image of the beloved in her various guises—from the divine Beautiful Lady to the buffoon Columbine. In *тьма* and *темнота*, the lyrical hero watches her alone, waiting for her, dreaming of meeting her. The contextual meanings that accompany the lexemes *тьма* and *темнота* (*darkness, murk*) in such contexts are “loneliness”, “waiting for a meeting”.

The development of this contextual meaning can go in several directions. The relationship of the lyrical hero with a Beautiful Lady can be tragicomically reinterpreted in terms of a puppet show (“Свет в окошке шатался...” [“The light in the window was wobbling...”]). In this case, love itself is a deception, a “buffoon's masquerade”, and *свет* (*light*) is the symbol of this masquerade. *Темнота* (*murk*) in which

there is no “Ee” [“Her”] (note the paradoxical combination of capital letters and quotation marks) is a symbol not only of loneliness, but also of frustration, of cruel insight. Laughing Harlequin and *темнота* (*murk*) are allies, they know the bitter truth that awaits the hero in love outside the door.

Тьма (*darkness*) in the situation of waiting for a meeting can be understood as the end of love, the extinction of passion, the resulting madness and even spiritual death: “Весенний день сменяла **тьма**, / Хладело сердце над могилой. / Я медленно сходил с ума, / Я думал холодно о милой” [Spring day was replaced by **darkness**/My heart was getting cold over the grave/I was slowly getting mad/ I was thinking coldly about my beloved] (Blok, 1960). In this poem, *весна, день, любовь* and *жизнь* (*spring, day, love and life*) are contrasted with *тьма, холоду, безумию* and *смерти* (*darkness, cold, madness and death*).

Until now, the contextual meanings that appeared in the words *тьма* и *темнота* (*darkness and murk*) corresponded to the traditional symbolism of darkness. But in some contexts, you can see that these lexemes are accompanied by positive connotations, and this is a striking feature of A. Blok's idiosyncrasy: all symbols are ambivalent, any meaning can turn into its opposite. So, in the poem “Я вышел. Медленно сходили...” [“I came out. Slowly descended...”] *тьма* (*darkness*) is a source of good memory, hope. In it, *тьма* (*darkness*) is associated with spring, memories, life and youth, dreams.

The lexeme *мрак* (*gloom*) as a synonym for the word *тьма* (*darkness*) can be accompanied by similar contextual meanings. For example, in the poem “Ни жаль мне дней ни радостных, ни знойных...” [“I am not sorry for the days neither joyful nor sultry...”] *мрак* is a symbol of the fading of passion. Just as in the poem “Я медленно сходил с ума” [“I was slowly losing my mind”], the context actualizes the senses “end”, “death”, “fading of passion”, “cold”.

Specific to the word *мрак* (*gloom*) is the contextual meaning of 'date', accompanied by the sense 'passion', and a passionate date is possible only in the dark, in the light of day, the beloved is “Недоступна в Своем терему” [“Cannot be reached in Her terem”]. If *мрак* (*gloom*) as a symbol of the end of love is surrounded in the context by words that have in their meaning the sense of “cold”, then poems where *мрак* (*gloom*) is associated with dating and passion are saturated with words whose meaning contains the sense of “fire”.

The *мгла* (*haze*) lexeme is found three times in the collection. In two cases, it is opposed to light, and light is an attribute of a Beautiful Lady in her divine hypostasis (“Признак истинного чуда...” [“A sign of a true miracle...”], “Ночью сумрачной и дикой...” [“A dark and wild night...”]). In the poem “Бегут неверные дневные тени...” [“The fallacious shadows of day run...”], *мгла* (*haze*) is associated with the expectation and anticipation of a meeting.

The most common and interesting from the point of view of semantics are the lexemes *сумерки* (*twilight*) and *сумрак* (*dusk*). The usual meaning of these lexemes combines the semantics of light and darkness. Therefore, in the world of “Poems about a Beautiful Lady”, the contextual meanings that accompany these words are so diverse and often far from each other.

On the one hand, both lexemes can be accompanied by contextual increments of meaning characteristic of the words *тьма, темнота, мгла* and *мрак* (*darkness, murk, haze, gloom*). So, in the poem “Я вышел. Медленно сходили...” [“I came out. Slowly descended...”] the words *тьма* (*darkness*) and *сумерки* (*twilight*) enter into synonymous relations. *Сумерки*, like *тьма* is a source of hope, memory of

spring, and love. In the poem “Высоко с темнотой сливается стена” [“High with darkness merges the wall”] synonyms are the words *темнота* and *сумерки*. The word *сумерки* actualizes the contextual senses “loneliness”, “waiting”. In the poem “Успокоительны, и чудны...” [“Soothing and strange...”] the phrase *сумрак зрбовой* (*grave dusk*) is used metaphorically in the meaning of “death”. In the poem “Catching trembling, cold hands”, the words *сумрак* (*dusk*) и *мрак* (*gloom*) enter into synonymous relations, realizing the contextual meanings of “date”, “passion”.

On the other hand, one can feel the connection of the lexemes *сумерки* and *сумрак* with the image of the mystical beloved. At *сумрак* (*dusk*) she leaves, in the *сумрак* (*dusk*) she abides, it is *сумрак* (*dusk*) that lurks under her eyelashes: “Ты отходишь в **сумрак** алый, / В бесконечные круги» (“Ты отходишь в сумрак алый...”, Blok, 1960); “Ты же в **сумраке**, милая, ближе / К неподвижному жизни ключу” (“Снова ближе вечерние тени...”, Blok, 1960). *Сумрак* or *сумерки* (*twilight*) precedes her appearance, from them comes the message from her, as in the poem “Сумерки, сумерки вешние...” [“Twilight, twilight of spring...”]. In this poem, as in some others, the symbolism of twilight and spring, as the time preceding the appearance of a Beautiful Lady, comes together.

Сумрак (*dusk*) and *сумерки* (*twilight*) can be interpreted as a premonition, a foreboding of something. So, in the poem “Хранила я среди младых созвучий...” [“I kept among the young sounds...”] The Beautiful Lady stays in *сумраке* (*twilight*) until *другая весна* (*another spring*) comes and последний день [the last day] brings the time for Eternal Femininity to *расцвести* (*bloom*). In the poem “Я долго ждал – ты вышла поздно...” [“I waited for a long time, you came out late...”] the lyrical hero waits in *сумрак* (*twilight*) until *вспыхнет первый пламень* (*the first flame flares up*), the Lady appears and *вечный свет* (*the eternal light*) shines. In the poem “При посылке роз” [“At sending roses”], the phrase *младые сумерки* (*young twilight*) is used metaphorically and means “the time of youth and innocence before the arrival of the first love, before the soul is illuminated by passion”.

7. Conclusion

The symbolism of light and darkness in the world of “Poems about a Beautiful Lady” has an undeniable originality. Light and darkness can be contrasted. *Свет* (*light*) is an attribute of a Beautiful Lady in her divine incarnation. *Свет* (*light*) is revelation, sacred knowledge. *Свет* (*light*) can also be a sign that promises a meeting with the beloved, although it is wrong, deceptive. *Тьма* (*darkness*) is associated with loneliness, the fading of passion, death, madness. But at the same time, *тьма* and *сумерки* (*darkness and twilight*) can be a source of hope, memories of love, *мрак* and *сумрак* (*gloom and dusk*) can represent the time of a date. *Сумрак* and *сумерки* (*twilight*) are almost as closely related to the image of the mystical beloved as *свет* (*light*). But there is also a difference. The semantics of the words *сумерки* and *сумрак* (*dusk, twilight*) are based on the senses “anticipation”, “premonition”. The Beautiful Lady and the lyrical hero remain in the twilight until the day when the Divine Sophia will appear in the light and transform the world.

References

- Blok, A. A. (1960). *Sobraniye sochineny v 8 tomakh [Collected works in 8 volumes]*. State Publishing House of Fiction. [in Russ.].
- Dahl, V. I. (1882). *Tolkovyj slovar' zhivago velikoruskago jazyka [Explanatory dictionary of the living Great Russian language]*. Publishing house of the bookseller-typographer M. O. Wolf. [in Russ.].
- Evgenieva, A. P. (Ed.). (1988). *Slovar' russkogo jazyka [Dictionary of the Russian language]*. Russian language. [in Russ.].
- Krasnova, E. A. (2019). Ob aktual'no napravlenii lingvopo`etiki: russkie sojuzy na tekstovoj sluzhbe (k istorii voprosa) [On the current direction of linguopoetics: Russian unions in the text service (to the history of the issue)]. *Nauchny dialog = Scientific Dialogue*, 7, 70-88. [in Russ.].
- Ozhegov, S. I. (2004). *Slovar' russkogo jazyka [Dictionary of the Russian language] ONYX 21 century*, World and Education. [in Russ.].
- Spivakova, E. M. (2019). Tolkovanie po`eticheskogo slova (na primere leksemy "son" v "Stihah o Prekrasnoj Dame" A. Bloka) [Interpretation of a poetic word (on the example of the lexeme "dream" in "Poems about a Beautiful Lady" by A. Blok)]. *Filologicheskie nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, 4, 187-192. [in Russ.].
- Spivakova, E. M. (2020). Svet v mire "Stihov o Prekrasnoj Dame" [Light in the world of "Poems about a Beautiful Lady"]. *Filologicheskie nauki. Voprosy teorii i praktiki*, 2, 130-134. [in Russ.].
- Ushakov, D. N. (2008). *Bol'shoj tolkovyj slovar' russkogo jazyka [Large explanatory dictionary of the Russian language]*. House of Slavic Books. [in Russ.].
- Vlavatskaya, M. V. (2020). Kombinatorno-semanticheskij analiz kollokatsij kak metod lingvisticheskogo issledovaniya (na primere kolorativnyh kollokatsij, obrazovannyh po ad"ektivnomu tipu). [Combinatorial-semantic analysis of collocations as a method of linguistic research (on the example of colorative collocations formed by the adjectival type)]. *Scientific Dialogue*, 4, 40-57. [in Russ.].
- Vlavatskaya, M. V. (2018). Okkazional'naja kombinatornaja leksikologija kak oblast' izuchenija okkazional'nyh kollokatsij [Occasional combinatorial lexicology as a field of study of occasional collocations]. *Scientific Dialogue*, 7, 30-39. [in Russ.].
- Vlavatskaya, M. V. (2017). Sintagmatika vs. Kombinatorika: osnovy kombinatornoj lingvistiki [Syntagmatics vs. Combinatorics: fundamentals of combinatorial linguistics]. *Scientific Dialogue*, 1, 35-45. [in Russ.].